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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN MAYORAL ELECTIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus its coverage December 12 on the aftermath of Saturday's Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral elections, their impact on each political party's future development and on the 2008 presidential elections. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, ran a banner headline on page three that read "DPP Pushes for 3-in-1 Voting in 2008 [i.e. the legislative, presidential elections, and the referendum on retrieving the KMT's party assets]"

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial called Saturday's election results a significant warning signal for the KMT and its party chairman Ma Ying-jeou. The article urged the KMT thoroughly to review its political line which deviated from Taiwan's mainstream public view. An editorial in the pro-status quo "China Times" also said the KMT's top priority now is to construct its own discourse on nativism. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said the election outcomes indicated "no improvement or progress, but prolonged woes for Taiwan." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," urged both the Blue and Green camps to "cease cutthroat partisanship and engage in a more healthy and constructive form of competition." End summary.

A) "KMT Must Thoroughly Review Its Line That Deviates from Taiwan's Mainstream Public View"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (12/12):

"... In a nutshell, the results of last Saturday's Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral elections are a big warning signal for the KMT and Ma Ying-jeou's plan for the 2008 presidential elections. It seems that political maneuvering approaches that appeal to image-shaping no longer worked, and the seemingly impressive myth of Ma Ying-jeou is on the verge of falling apart. Ma must demonstrate a more pragmatic leadership. More importantly, the KMT must resolutely relinquish its ill-gotten party assets, act quickly to handle those party members who have been allegedly involved in corruption, review its drastic approach of showing opposition for opposition's sake, and genuinely play the role of a rational opposition party. The KMT will then have a bright future in the wake of such thorough reforms."

B) "Constructing Nativism Discourse Is the KMT's Top Priority"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (12/12):

"Results of the Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral elections showed on the surface that the island's political landscape of the Blue camp keeping the north while the Green camp holding the south remains unchanged. But in reality, the results indicated that the DPP,

which has been dogged by corruption scandals over the past year, has at least held its ground and would not fall apart. In contrast, the election results should be viewed as a setback for the KMT, which was generally believed to enjoy a higher approval rating prior to the elections. ...

".... [T]he DPP's primary appeal for every election held after 2000 remains the assertion of maintaining a nativist regime. This strategy has all the more highlighted that insufficient discussion on nativism has become the KMT's Achilles heel regarding its future development. The KMT should ponder the true contents of its discourse on nativism. We want to remind the KMT that the party's future will be limited as long as it fails to have a comprehensive, convincing and reliable discourse on nativism."

C) "Ma's Loss Isn't Taiwan's Gain"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] noted in an editorial (12/12):

"Results of Saturday's elections show Taiwan's political landscape remains unchanged, with the pro-independence green camp keeping the south and the pan-blue opposition holding the north. The Kuomintang (KMT) lost its best chance of wresting Kaohsiung from the scandal-plagued Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). This means not improvement or progress, but prolonged woes, for Taiwan. It was a setback for KMT chief Ma Ying-jeou, his first electoral defeat since becoming party chairman last year.

"By helping the DPP candidate to win against the odds, the embattled president now can claim to enjoy considerable support among the fundamentalist supporters. Barring another scandal that directly implicates him, any further attempts to unseat him are futile. Ma may come under scrutiny from within the KMT. His leadership will be challenged and party members will criticize him for his unwillingness to sacrifice for the party. His reluctance to resign from office after he was investigated by prosecutors for alleged embezzlement is no holier than that of the president."

D) "Voters Demand Healthy Competition"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" circulation: 20,000 editorialized (12/12):

"Besides displaying the strong will of Taiwan voters to maintain our hard-won democratic achievements, the results of Saturday's Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral and city council polls sent a clear message to both the 'green' camp led by the governing Democratic Progressive Party and the 'blue' camp of the opposition Kuomintang that the two camps should cease cutthroat partisanship and engage in a more healthy and constructive form of competition. The DPP's success in retaining its eight-year hold on Kaohsiung City and its fundamental base of electoral support in Taipei did show that inner-party calls for Chen to resign were premature and eased divisions and an emerging power struggle within the party. The polls also put the DPP potential competitors for the party's presidential nomination back on a more or less equal footing, even though former premier and ex-Kaohsiung City mayor Frank Hsieh may have gained a slight edge in the wake of his impressive campaign in Taipei City and the contribution of his legacy in Kaohsiung to the narrow victory of DPP standard-bearer Chen Chu in the southern port metropolis.

"The KMT's failure to 'win back' Kaohsiung after eight years of DPP administration is a timely 'wake-up call' to leaders and supporters of the pan-KMT camp on the widespread wishful thinking that Ma is 'the one' who can easily recover Taiwan back for the former ruling party in March 2008. Saturday's result also exposed to all Taiwan citizens the 'Achilles heels' of the KMT, namely its poor leadership, lack of clear or progressive policy for Taiwan and the persistence of its ingrained culture of institutional, not individual, political corruption. On the other hand, the self-liquidation of the People First Party and the departure of PFP Chairman James Soong should free the KMT from political hijacking by the PFP remnants, especially on such issues as the long-delayed procurement of advanced defensive weapon systems from the United States and the long-frozen nominations to the Control Yuan."

YOUNG